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ABSTRACT

There are two philosophies concerning how teachers might best facilitate their students' acquisition of communication competence. The first, a skills-oriented philosophy, adopts a building-block approach to the acquisition of communication competence. Organizationally, a public speaking course might start with a unit on analyzing audience and occasion and proceed through such units as the selection of topics and purposes, the selection and support of main ideas, and so on. For each unit, students would be taught and evaluated in terms of component skills. Judgments about the success of the total effort would be reserved until the end of the semester. The second philosophy is a function-oriented approach. A public speaking course developed in this fashion would include numerous holistic public presentations. Within some taxonomy of function, the presentations would be sequenced to move from less difficult to more difficult. Success for each speech would be judged in terms of relative accomplishment of the specific task or function. Of these two approaches, the skills-oriented approach would be most useful if one subscribes to the view of communication as instrument for conveying knowledge, expressing feelings, changing attitudes, or directing action. If, however, communication is viewed as a transactional process by which individuals create and sustain the realities by which they live, a function-oriented approach would possess greater utility. (HOD)

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ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT COMMUNICATION: IMPACT ON TEACHING AND TEACHER PREPARATION

by

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(1) Communication Theory and Instructional Theory

(2) The Goals of Communication Teacher Education: A University Perspective

Central States Speech Association Convention
Lincoln, Nebraska, April 7-9, 1983

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Communication Theory and Instructional Theory

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Within recent years, a number of individuals have attempted to contrast two views of communication. As Jack Orr (1978) summarizes those views, the contrast is between:

View I: Communication as an instrument for conveying knowledge, expressing feelings, changing attitudes, or directing action.

View II: Communication as the transactional process which creates and sustains the realities by which we live.

Linda Harris has identified the implications of these views for the nature of communication competence.

View I: Competence is the ability to learn and enact the rules of an extant system (or fitting into a social system). She labels this satisfactory competence.

View II: Competence is the ability to cocreate and comaintain the social order (or changing, rather than fitting into, the social system). She labels this optimal competence.

In my presentation today, I will contrast two approaches or philosophies concerning how teachers might best facilitate the acquisition of communication competence for their students. In doing so, I suggest that one's view of the nature of communication should influence one's selection of instructional theory and strategy.

The first view I wish to describe, I will label a skills-oriented approach. Closely associated with the Competency-Based Education Movement of the 1970s, it is probably the dominant approach in communication education today. In clarifying the nature of this position I will, first, identify the basic assumptions which define it and, second, describe how a beginning public speaking course might be developed out of the position.

Basic assumptions:

1. It is possible to identify a repertoire of elements which define effective communication.
2. These elements can be broken down into small units and ordered according to some logical sequence.
3. Students should be pretested to determine their mastery of the requisite elements and should then begin working at an appropriate level and unit of instruction.
4. Teachers should develop a variety of instructional strategies which can aid students' progress through the sequential acquisition of elements.
5. Criterion-referenced testing should be used to determine progress in acquiring the relevant elements.

A public speaking course developed in this fashion adopts a building-block approach to the acquisition of communication competence. Organizationally, the course might start with a unit on analyzing audience and occasion and proceed through such units as selecting topics and purposes, selecting and supporting main ideas, organizing the body of the speech, preparing the introduction, preparing the conclusion, and delivering the speech. For each unit, students would be taught and evaluated in terms of component skills. Thus, for example, the "organizing-the-body-of-the-speech" unit might require students to prepare and deliver a short speech utilizing one of the many common patterns of organization (e.g., topical, chronological, spatial, problem solution). Success would be judged in terms of the students' ability to select and use one of the patterns. Judgments about the success of the total effort would be reserved until toward the end of the semester.

I label the second pedagogical view a function-oriented approach. While less frequently defended in print, it nevertheless guides pedagogical practice in many communication classrooms. Among the basic assumptions which define this position are:

1. The acquisition of communication skills begins with a function--a need to get something done through communication--and moves gradually toward acquiring the forms which reveal that function.
2. Students can learn how to become competent communicators most efficiently by focusing on function holistically rather than by learning isolated, decontextual skills.
3. The teacher should utilize challenging holistic communication activities focused on function and should sequence them to move from less difficult to more difficult.
4. When students lack a specific skill, they should be assigned functional tasks which maximize the necessity for utilization of that skill.
5. Testing should be norm-referenced.

A public speaking course developed in this fashion would include numerous holistic public presentations. Within some taxonomy of function (e.g., inform, persuade, entertain), the presentations would be sequenced to move from less difficult to more difficult. Persuasive speeches might start, for example, with those which affirm a proposition of fact and move through speeches which affirm a proposition of value, create concern for a problem, and affirm a proposition of policy. Success for each speech would be judged in terms of relative accomplishment of the specific task or function.

Having briefly described two positions concerning facilitating the acquisition of communication competence, it is now possible to sharpen the contrast between them by pairing their respective views on learning:

Skills-Oriented	Function-Oriented
Learning should start with the smallest form	Learning should start with the least difficult function
Learning should move from form to function	Learning should move from function to form
Learning should be decontextual	Learning should be contextual
Learning should be reductionistic	Learning should be holistic
Testing should be criterion-referenced	Testing should be norm-referenced

Having described two instructional theories, I wish to suggest that the skills-oriented approach seems most useful if one subscribes to the view of communication as an instrument for conveying knowledge, expressing feelings, changing attitudes, or directing action. Helping individuals fit into a social system is, I think, best achieved by teaching them to identify and enact the rules of that system. If, however, communication is viewed as a transactional process by which individuals create and sustain the realities by which they live, a function-oriented approach would seem to possess greater utility.

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The Goals of Communication Teacher Education: A University Perspective

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Logically, the preparation of teachers is determined by the nature of (1) those individuals to be trained and (2) the teaching tasks for which they are being prepared. The development and implementation of a discipline-based program for teacher education, therefore, would seem to require nothing but the straightforward application of three components: (1) a conceptualization of effective teaching, (2) measurement techniques for assessing level of teaching competencies, and (3) instructional strategies for remedying identified deficiencies. Sounds simple, right? Well, it is and in the next several minutes I hope to share with you four reasons why discipline-based teacher education is not likely to leave students adequately prepared for all of their classroom teaching experiences.

First, while researchers are making progress, we currently lack an empirically based conceptualization of effective teaching. To quote Walter Doyle's 1977 summary of nine reviews of the relevant research literature:

> "Reviewers have concluded, with remarkable regularity, that few consistent relationships between teacher variables and effectiveness criteria can be established" (p. 164).

Without a solid fesearch foundation, teacher education program are often at the mercy of what sounds good. As a result, teacher education, as Gage correctly observes, is "more than ever at the mercy of powerful and passionate writers who shift education thinking ever more erratically with their manifestos" (1978, p. 41). Thus, we move from the religion of television in the 1950s to teaching machines and programmed instruction in the 1960s to mastery learning and performance or competency-based criteria in the 1970s to the computer and video-disc technology in the 1980s.

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While not denying the potential utility of any of these strategies, I merely point out that no solid empirical evidence exists on which to base choices among them. My point, then, is that current conceptualizations of effective teaching are rhetorically rather than empirically based--a situation which makes a skills based approach to teacher education a risky endeavor.

Second, teacher educators are notoriously poor at anticipating the future state of the world, the nation, education, teaching, or the classroom buildings into which their charges are placed. The question I raise here is that of lead time. Should, for example, teacher education prepare students for education as it is or as it will be one year, five years, ten years, or further into the future? Assuming a futuristic perspective, should prediction of future trends be based on a completely objective prediction of future trends or on a more Utopian statement of what ought to be? Obviously these are difficult questions--but important ones. Answers to them determine the ability of educators to respond to changing circumstances. Whether these predictions are accurate or not, however, there is yet an additional complication--the extreme variability of instructional settings. It is hard to imagine, for example, any mechanism by which students can be prepared equally well to cope with the challenges of rural or urban, public or private, small or large schools. My second point, then, is that even if an empirically based conceptualization of teaching existed, there is no guarantee that it would be applicable in those circumstances in which future teachers are likely to teach.

Third, a discipline-based teacher education program is part of a complex and a political process. It fits within a recruitment--selection--admission--general education--subject education--teacher education--

internship--certification--continuing education process which raises the inevitable question of "who decides what" at all relevant stages. The answer to the question, of course, varies with the state, college or university, school, department, and public school system--to cite but a few of the relevant political units. In any case, multiple answers to the question of "who decides what" produces a situation in which it is inevitable that some areas of preparation receive greater emphasis than they deserve while others receive less. My third point, then, is that questions of boundaries and control limit what a discipline-based teacher education program can achieve.

Fourth, the task of the secondary school speech communication teacher is so varied and complex that any program of discipline-based teacher education is bound to be limited. Not only must speech teachers be prepared to teach the basic course, they must also be prepared to teach such commonly offered courses as advanced speech, drama, debate, radio/television/mass media, oral interpretation, film, discussion, and interpersonal communication. In many schools, they must also be prepared to teach in their minor area or areas and they are also expected to direct extra-curricular offerings in theatre, debate, individual events, and discussion/student congress. No program of teacher education could prepare an individual to do all of these tasks equally well.

In summary, then, I have argued that for at least four reasons discipline-based teacher education is not likely to leave students adequately prepared for all of their classroom teaching experiences. Is that cause for concern? Of course. At the same time, I believe that the situation is far from hopeless. Discipline-based teacher education programs can and should build into themselves the self-corrective devices of

cybernation. Such devices can be located both in the program and in the prospective teacher. Within the program, for example, teacher educators can develop mechanisms for periodically examining and updating the content of their program. Probably more important, however, teacher education programs can develop teachers who possess those characteristics which allow them to be self-corrective on their own. Presumably, for example, teachers who are professionally committed and who have learned the skills of research and problem-solving are able to use the resources of their discipline (journals, conventions, etc.) to adapt to the demands of changing times and circumstances.

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